

# Lady becomes first Lord Mayor

Darwin City Council  
**50** years  
 2007

*This week we look at how Darwin's first lady mayor's achievements as part of a series of weekly columns depicting the people, places and projects from our first 50 years.*

**RIGHT:**  
 Clare Martin and Ella Stack place final railway clips for Darwin to Adelaide railway on September 25, 2003.

**BELOW:**  
 Lord Mayor Ella Stack, photos NT Library and Information Service.



**With the election of Dr Ella Stack on 3 May 1975, Darwin had its first female Mayor, later to become Darwin's very first Lord Mayor.**

Dr Ellen (Ella) Mary Stack was a general medical practitioner who had been living in Darwin since 1961, after starting her career in New South Wales.

She had served on Council since 1969 and had reportedly established a reputation as a hardworking and effective Alderman.

In 1975, Dr Stack was persuaded to stand for the Mayoralty by colourful former Mayor, Harold 'Tiger' Brennan.

Brennan had decided not to re-stand for Mayor in view of his declining health and the increasing demands of the position, particularly after the destruction of Darwin by Cyclone Tracy in December 1974.

Dr Stack stood against two male candidates and won easily with more than 52 per cent of the valid primary vote. In 1978 she was re-elected with 43 per cent of the vote in a six-way contest.

Her time as Mayor, covering the reconstruction after Cyclone Tracy and the first years of Northern Territory self government, was a period of expansion for the Council. In that process, Dr Stack's role was substantial.

As the effectively first full-time Mayor, Stack was able to devote more time to the position and promote the role of Mayor.

She was also a key member of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and other cyclone relief organisations through which she strengthened her authority within and outside of Council.

Dr Stack used the mayoral role to be

an advocate and ambassador for Darwin and its people.

She was an active and vocal supporter of projects such as the Darwin to Adelaide railway and Darwin Performing Arts Centre.

On her watch, the Smith Street Mall was also completed, in an attempt to revitalise the CBD and help traders compete against suburban shopping centres.

In November 1979, Darwin was given capital city status and Dr Stack as Mayor was proclaimed Lord Mayor by Her Majesty the Queen.

In May 1980 Dr Stack stood down from Council to unsuccessfully contest a seat in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. After this she returned to medical practice.

She remained active in a number of health and community organisations such as St John Ambulance, the Mendes School of Health Research and the Australia Day Council. Eventually, she and her husband retired interstate.

In 2003, Dr Stack returned to Darwin to celebrate the completion of the Darwin to Adelaide railway.

She joined Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin in placing the final rail clips into position.

She used a railway clip presented to her in Kujigera in 1979 which she promised would be used if the line ever made it to Darwin.

At the ceremony Dr Stack recalled: "I went to every television and radio station in the southern states trying to push the concept and get people excited about it."

"It was my 'magnificent obsession'," she said. And now an obsession that has been fulfilled.